



For Couples/Relationship Counseling: Additional Info and Policies

I enjoy very much working with people in relationships. My focus in couples and relationship counseling is on improving communication and problem-solving skills, understanding relationship patterns, and increasing empathy and emotional engagement towards one another, which, in turn, improves the sense of connection between partners. The reason I call this both couples and relationship counseling is that in addition to working with marital or otherwise committed partners, I can also work with people in other relationships (e.g., parent and child, siblings, or close friends). I also work with same sex couples, as well as relationships in which one or more partner is transgender.

What brings people to relationship counseling?

Some of the relationship issues I have worked with have included communication problems, recovering from affairs and infidelity, sexual issues, and parenting issues. When working with relationships, I sometimes give exercises to practice at home between sessions.

Sometimes part of a couples' difficulty is about parenting issues. I have training and experience teaching parenting skills, and I often provide parenting skills coaching as part of counseling.

Another service I provide is supportive therapy and consultation to parents and family members when a teen or young adult comes out about sexual orientation or gender identity. In these cases, the work may be less about what is happening *between* the parents and more about understanding each parent's own feelings about the young person's disclosure. However, sometimes, family members differ on how to process and deal with this revelation and I can help you work through your feelings and your family plan for healing. I can help you to learn more about sexual and gender identity development and assist you in finding the support you need to help you all relate better.

When and why do we need relationship counseling?

According to research conducted by John Gottman, Ph.D., most couples wait, on average, six years before seeking counseling for relationship problems. This means that the relationship is in a high level of distress when they finally get to counseling, and it can take a lot of work to make the repairs that are necessary to save and improve the relationship. That may be your situation, or you may have called me sooner, when your relationship distress is moderate or even low. My wish for couples is that more of them will begin to turn to couples therapy as a preventative measure — a way to learn to take care of their investment in one another and learn skills and tools to help keep their relationship joyful and strong.

Will our relationship make it?

Most couples come to me seeking hope, healing, and repair of a relationship that has experienced some damage and distress. We can work on healing your relationship and learning better ways for you to connect and feel heard and valued. But some people seek couples counseling because they need help disengaging from a relationship with kindness and care. They want to separate in a way that allows them to be good to one another. This is something I can also help with. Some clinicians believe that all relationships must be saved. I recognize that sometimes relationships need to end or transition into a friendship or something else.



How do we begin?

We will meet for the first session together with all of us in the room and I will ask you about your relationship history and difficulties. Just as with individual counseling, the first session is 90 minutes if our schedules allow it. After that meeting, if I think I can be helpful, I will invite you to continue to the second part of the assessment. You two may want to go home and discuss together whether you want to continue. The second part consists of you each filling out some paperwork and me interviewing each of you about your individual histories. After those meetings, we'll have another session in which we discuss treatment goals and a plan to be sure we are all on the same page.

To summarize, getting started entails a thorough assessment, as a team and individually. After this assessment, we will mostly meet all together as we move forward. Infrequently, I may decide that an individual check-in will help move the work along, but if so, it will be for a specific purpose and usually only if we are working together longer term.

Confidentiality

When you are in couples/relationship therapy and you are both meeting with me, of course anything either of you tells me isn't being kept confidential from the other one of you, because you are both there together hearing everything that's said. If either of you contact me or meet with me individually, tell me additional information, and ask me to keep it secret from the other of you, it puts me in a very difficult situation for several reasons. One is that I believe relationships thrive best in an atmosphere of honesty and openness, so secrets aren't generally helpful. Another is that even if I think holding some information private could be useful in a particular situation, it is very difficult for me to remember and keep track of when, and from whom, I learned specific information. Thus, I might inadvertently let slip in a couples session something I heard from one of you individually, if I forgot the context in which I learned the information. So, generally, I will encourage you to tell your partner that information, and if you'd like, I can help you prepare for how to have that conversation, and even help you have the conversation in a joint session with me. Because you are both my clients, you both have the right to access your chart and see the material in it because, as I explained above, honesty and openness are good for intimate relationships.

New York regulations may allow each participant in the couples/marital therapy to access and disclose the couples/marital treatment records and information solely at his/her own individual request. It is my policy, however, to require that, as a condition of your participating in this therapy, you agree that BOTH participants in the couples/marital therapy must give formal authorization to the release of any couples/marital therapy records or information to anyone, including the participants themselves. Consequently, by signing the "Receipt Acknowledgement and Consent Form," you agree that, unless BOTH participants authorize, I will not release any treatment records or information to anyone, unless I am legally compelled to do so. My policy is intended to allow each of you to be able to openly disclose information in the couples/marital therapy without fear that the other person will obtain the treatment records and then use that information against the person who initially disclosed the information.

In summary, I will not disclose treatment records or information to anyone, including you, unless you BOTH authorize the disclosure of those records or information, or unless I am legally compelled to do so.



Considerations regarding health insurance

As I explained in my “Client Information and Policies” document, insurance companies do not reimburse all conditions that may be the focus of psychotherapy, such as relationship conflict. When I do couples therapy, I consider both of you and your relationship to be my clients. But if you want to use health insurance for your couples therapy, we must choose one of you to be the official “identified patient” for insurance billing purposes, and I must assign a reimbursable mental disorder diagnosis (other than relationship distress) to that individual. If you are using health insurance, because insurance companies won’t routinely reimburse for sessions longer than the 50 minute standard, we will have to limit our sessions to the standard 50 minutes (except for the first session, in which I generally give you extra time for no extra charge).

In Case of Legal Conflict between You

It’s important for you to understand that information discussed in couples/relationship therapy is for therapeutic purposes and is not intended for use in any legal proceedings involving the partners. I need your agreement that in any such proceedings, neither of you will ask me to testify in court, whether in person, or by affidavit. You also agree to instruct your attorneys not to subpoena me or to refer in any court filing to anything I have said or done.

Note that such agreement may not prevent a judge from requiring my testimony, even though I will work to prevent such an event. If I am required to testify, I am ethically bound not to give my opinion about either parent’s custody or visitation suitability. If the court appoints a custody evaluator, legal advocate for the child, or parenting coordinator, I will provide information as needed (if appropriate releases are signed or a court order is provided), but I will not make any recommendations about the final decision. Furthermore, if I am required to appear as a witness, the party responsible for my participation agrees to reimburse me at the rate of \$200/hour for time spent traveling, preparing reports, testifying, being in attendance, and any other case-related costs.